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THE
NATURE and DESIGN
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

Extracted from a late AUTHOR.

THE TWELFTH EDITION.



L O N D O N :

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The Nature and Design of Christianity.

I. **T**HE wisdom of mankind has for several ages been enquiring into the nature of man, and the nature of the world in which he is placed.

The wants and miseries of human nature, and the vanity of worldly enjoyments, have made it difficult for the wisest men to tell, what human happiness was, or wherein it consisted.

It has pleased the infinite goodness of God to satisfy our enquiries, by a revelation made to the world, by his Son Jesus Christ.

This revelation has laid open the great secrets of Providence from the creation of the world. It has explained the present state of things, and given man all the information that is necessary, both to give him rest here, and to lead him safely to everlasting happiness.

It is now only necessary that the poor wisdom of man do not exalt itself against God, that we suffer our eyes to be opened by him that made them, and our lives to be conducted by him, in whom *we live, move, and have our being.*

II. As happiness is the sole end of all our labours, so this revelation aims at nothing else.

It gives us right notions of ourselves, of our true good and real evil; it shews us our true condition, both our greatness and meanness, our happiness and misery:

Before this, man was a mere riddle to himself, and his condition full of darkness and perplexity; a restless inhabitant of a miserable, disorder'd world, *walking in a vain shadow and disquieting himself in vain.*

But this light has dispersed the anxiety of his vain conjectures. It has brought us acquainted with God; and, by adding heaven to earth, and eternity to time, has opened such a glorious view of things, as leads men, even in this world, to a *peace of God which passeth all understanding.*

III. This revelation acquaints us, that we have a spirit within us, which was created after the divine image:

image: that this spirit is now in a fallen condition; that the body in which it is placed is its sepulchre, where it is enslaved to fleshly thoughts, blinded with false notions of good and evil, and dead to all taste of its true happiness.

It teaches us, that this world in which we live, is also in a disordered, irregular state, and cursed for the sake of man: that it is no longer the paradise that God made it, but the remains of a drowned world, full of marks of God's displeasure, and the sin of its inhabitants.

That it is a mere wilderness, a state of darkness, a vale of misery: where vice and madness, dreams and shadows, variously please and torment the short miserable lives of men.

Devils also, and evil spirits have here their residence, promoting the works of darkness, and wandering up and down seeking whom they may devour.

So that man, in his natural state, is like a person sick of variety of diseases, knowing neither his distempers nor his cure, and inclosed in a place where he can hear, or see, or feel, or taste of nothing but what tends to enflame his disorders.

IV. But Christianity puts an end to this state of things, blots out all the ideas of worldly wisdom, brings the world itself to ashes, and creates all anew. It calls man from an animal life, and earthly societies, to be born again of the Holy Spirit, and be made a member of the kingdom of God.

It crushes into nothing the concerns of this life, condemns it as a state of vanity and darkness, and leads man to happiness with God in the realms of light.

It proposes the purifying of our souls, enlivened with the divine Spirit; it sets before us new good and evils, and forms us to a glorious participation of the divine nature.

This is the one end of Christianity. It does not leave us to grovel on in the desires of the flesh, to cast about for worldly happiness, and wander in darkness and exile from God: but the sole design of it is, to lead us from all thoughts of rest here

to separate us from worldly tempers; to deliver us from the folly of our passions, the slavery of our own nature, the power of evil spirits, and unite us to God, the true fountain of real good. This is the mighty change which Christianity aims at: to reform our whole nature, renew our souls in the image of God, and make them the inhabitants of heavenly and immortal bodies.

V. The manner in which it changes our whole state, is equally great and wonderful.

I am the way, the truth, and the life, saith our blessed Lord, no man cometh to the Father but by me.

As all things were created by the Son of God, and *without him was not any thing made that was made*, so are all things redeemed and restored by the same divine person.

As nothing could come into Being without him, so nothing can enter into a state of happiness but by him.

The dignity of this redemption at once confounds the pride, and relieves the misery of man. How fallen must he be from God, that should need so great a Mediator! And on the other hand, how full of comfort is the thought that so high a method, so stupendous a means, should be taken to restore him to a state of peace and favour with God.

VI. This is the true point of view, in which every christian is to behold himself. He is to overlook the poor projects of this life, and consider himself as a creature, through his natural corruption, fallen into a state of endless misery; but by the mercy of God, redeemed to a condition of everlasting happiness.

All the precepts and doctrines of the Gospel are founded on these two great truths, the deplorable corruption of human nature, and its new birth in Christ Jesus.

The one includes all the misery, the other all the happiness of man.

It is on these, that the whole frame of Christianity is built; forbidding only such things as fasten us to the disorders of sin, and commanding only those duties which lead us into the liberty of the sons

sons of God. So that if we think and act as Christians, we act suitably to these terms of our condition, fearing and avoiding all the motions of our corrupted nature, cherishing the secret inspirations of the Holy Spirit, opening our minds for the reception of the divine light, and pressing after all the perfections of our new birth.

All Christians are continually to behave themselves conformable, to this double capacity. We are to fear, and watch, and pray, like men that are always on the brink of eternal death; and to believe and hope, and labour, and aspire, like Christians, that are called to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life.

VII. This knowledge of ourselves makes human life a state of infinite importance, placed upon so dreadful a point betwixt two such eternities.

Well might our Saviour say to one that begged first to go and bury his father, *follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.*

For what is all the bustle and hurry of the world but a dead show, and its greatest actors but dead men, when compared with that real life to which the followers of Christ are redeemed.

Had we been made only for this world, worldly wisdom had been our highest wisdom; but seeing we are redeemed to an entirely contrary state, worldly wisdom is now our greatest foolishness.

It is now our only wisdom, to understand our new state, and conduct ourselves by the principles of our redemption.

VIII. The nature of our Christian calling is of that concern, as to deserve all our thoughts; and is indeed only to be perceived by great seriousness and attention of mind.

The Christian state is an invisible life in the Spirit of God, supported not by sensible goods, but the spiritual graces of faith and hope: so that man, busied in earthly cares and enjoyments, perceives nothing of this great and heavenly calling.

The changes which Christianity makes in the present state of things, are all invisible: its goods and evils which are the only true standards of our actions, are not subject to the knowledge of our senses.

In God we live, and move, and have our being: but how unseen, how unfelt is all this!

Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the true light that lighteth every one that cometh into the world. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. The whole creation subsists in him and by him. No person is in any favour with God, but by this great Mediator. But how invisible, how unknown to all our senses is this state of things!

Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit consecrated to God, members of Christ's mystical body, of his flesh and bones, receiving life, spirit, and motion from him their head.

But our senses see no farther than our parents and kindred according to the flesh, and fix our hearts to earthly friendships and relations. Well then may this life be deemed a state of darkness, since it thus clouds and covers all the true appearances of things, and keeps our minds insensible and unaffected with matters of such infinite moment.

IX. Would we therefore know our true condition, we must search after a life that is hid with Christ in God. We must consider ourselves, as parts of Christ's mystical body, and as members of the kingdom of heaven. In vain do we consider the beauty and strength of our bodies, our alliances with men, and the distinctions of this world: for these things no more constitute the state of human life, than rich coffins or beautiful monuments, constitute the state of the dead.

We justly pity the last poor effects of human greatness when we see a breathless carcase lying in state. It appears so far from any real honour, that it rather looks like ridiculing the misery of our nature. But were religion to form our judgments, the life of a proud, voluptuous, sensual man, though shining in all the splendor of the world, would give us no higher an idea of human dignity, than a poor corpse laid in state.

For a sinner, when glorying in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is a more shocking sight of misery ridiculed, than any pageantry that can expose the dead.

X. We

X. We have an Apostle's authority to say, that *he who liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth.*

This shews us that when we enquire what our life is, we must think of something higher than the vigour of our blood, the gaiety of our spirits, or the enjoyment of sensual pleasures; since these, tho' the allowed signs of living men, are often undeniable proofs of dead Christians.

When therefore we would truly know what our life or happiness is, we must look at nothing that is sensible or temporal. We may as well dig in the earth for wisdom, as look at flesh and blood to see what we are, or at worldly enjoyments to find what we want, or at temporal evils, to see what we have to fear.

Our blessed Saviour put an absolute end to all enquiries of this kind, when he said, *Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.*

Here our bodies, and all bodily enjoyments, are at one dash struck out of the account of happiness, and the present state of things made so very low and insignificant, that he who can only deprive us of them, has not power enough to deserve our fear.

We must therefore, if we would conceive our true state, our real good and evil, look farther than these dim eyes of flesh can carry our views. We must, with the eyes of faith, penetrate into the invisible world, the world of spirits, and consider our order and condition among them; a world, which as St. John speaks, *hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* For it is there, among eternal beings, that we must take eternal fellowship, or fall into a kingdom of darkness and everlasting misery.

XI. Christianity is so noble in its ends, so extensive in its views, that it has no less subjects, than these to entertain our thoughts.

It buries our bodies, burns the present world, triumphs over death by a general resurrection, and opens all into an eternal state.

It never considers us in any other respect than as fallen spirits; it disregards worldly distinctions, and proposes

proposes nothing to our fears but eternal misery; nothing to our hopes but endless enjoyment with God.

This is the great, the important condition, in which Christianity has placed us, above our bodies, above the world, above death, to be present at the dissolution of all things, to see the earth in flames, and the heavens wrapt up like a scroll, to stand at the general resurrection, to appear at the universal judgment, and to live for ever when all that our eyes have seen is passed away and gone.

XII. Take therefore upon thee a temper suitable to this greatness of thy condition. Remember that thou art an eternal spirit, that thou art but for a few months or years in a state of flesh and blood, only to try, whether thou shalt be for ever happy with God, or for ever miserable with the devil.

Thou wilt hear of other concerns, and other greatness in the world. Thou wilt see every order of men, every family, every person, pursuing some fancied happiness, as if the world had not only happiness, but a particular kind of happiness for all its inhabitants.

But when thou seest this, fancy thou sawest all the world asleep; the prince no longer a prince; the beggar no longer begging, but every man sleeping out of his proper state; some happy, others tormented, and all changing their condition, as fast as one foolish dream could succeed another.

When thou hast seen this, if thou wilt, thou mayest go to sleep too, thou mayest lie down and dream. And this is all: for be as happy as the world can make thee, all is but sleeping and dreaming: and what is still worse, it is like sleeping in a ship, when thou shouldst be pumping for life; or dreaming thou art a prince, when thou shouldst be redeeming thyself from slavery.

XIII. This is no imaginary flight of a melancholy fancy, but the real nature of things.

For, if thou art that immortal nature, that fallen spirit, which religion teaches us: if thou art to meet death, resurrection, and judgment, as the fore-runners of an eternal state; what are the little
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flashes of pleasure, the changing appearances of worldly happiness, but so many sorts of dreams?

How canst thou talk of the advantages of fortune, the pleasures of food or apparel, without being in a dream?

Is the *beggar* asleep, when he fancies he is building himself fine houses? Is the *prisoner* in a dream when he imagines himself in open fields and fine groves? And canst thou think thy immortal spirit is awake, while it is delighting itself in the shadows and bubbles of worldly happiness?

For if it be true that man is upon trial; if the trial is for eternity; if life is but a vapour; what is there that deserves a serious thought, but how to get well out of the world, and make it a right passage to our eternal state?

XIV. It is the manner of some countries in the burial of their dead to put a staff, and shoes, and money in the sepulchre along with the corps.

We see the folly and ignorance of such a poor contrivance to assist the dead: but if we did but understand what is life, we should see as much folly in the poor contrivances to assist the Living.

For how many things do people labour after, break their rest and peace to get, which yet when gotten, are of just as much real use to them, as a staff and shoes to a corpse under ground? They are always adding something to their life; which is only like adding another pair of shoes to a body in the grave.

Thou mayest hire more servants, new paint thy rooms, and put on richer apparel; and these will help thee to be happy, as *golden* staffs, or *painted* shoes, will help a dead man to walk.

XV. If thou rememberest, that the whole race of mankind are a race of fallen spirits, that passeth through this world as an arrow passeth through the air; thou wilt soon perceive, that there is no wisdom or happiness, but in getting away to the best advantage.

If thou rememberest, that this life is but a vapour; that thou art in the body, only to be holy, humble, and heavenly minded: that thou standest
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upon the brink of death, resurrection and judgment; and that these great things will suddenly come upon thee like a thief in the night, thou wilt see a vanity in the things of this world, greater than any words can express.

Do but therefore know thyself as religion hath made thee known; do but see thyself in the light which Christ hath brought into the world, and then thou wilt see that nothing concerns thee, but what concerns an everlasting spirit that is going to God; and that there are no enjoyments here that are worth a thought, but such as may adorn thee with that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

XVI. This is the end of Christianity. It is not a school for the teaching of moral virtue. It is deeper and more divine in its designs: it implies an intire change of heart, a full dedication of ourselves, our souls, and bodies, unto God.

Our blessed Saviour came into the world, not to make any composition with it, but to put an end to the designs of flesh and blood: and to shew us we must either renounce the world to become sons of God, or by enjoying it take our portion among damned spirits.

Christianity is a state of things that wholly regards eternity: it knows of no other goods and evils but such as relate to another life.

It is a kingdom of heaven that has no other interests in this world, than as it takes its members out of it; and when the number of the elect is complete, this world will be consumed with fire, as having no other reason for its existence, than the furnishing members for that blessed society, which is to last for ever.

I cannot here omit observing the folly of human wisdom, which, full of imaginary projects pleases itself with its lasting establishments in a world doomed to destruction, and which is to last no longer than till a sufficient number is redeemed out of it.

Did we see a number of criminals hastening to take up their apartments, and contending for the best places in a building that was to be beat down

as soon as its old inhabitants had got safe out, we should see a contention full as wise as the wisdom of worldly ambition.

XVII. That Christianity requires a change of nature is plain from the whole tenor of the gospel.

The Saviour of the world saith, *that except a man be born again, of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* We are told, that to as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

These words plainly teach us, that Christianity implies an intire change of nature; that as our birth was to us the beginning of a new life, and brought us into a society of earthly enjoyments, so Christianity is another birth, that brings us into a condition altogether as new, as when we first saw the light.

We begin again to be, we enter upon fresh terms of life, have new tempers, new hopes, and fears, and an entire change of every thing that can be called good or evil.

This new birth is the very essence and soul of Christianity; it is the scale of the promises, the mark of our sonship, the earnest of our inheritance, and the sure proof of our acceptance with God.

XVIII. If we would know, what a change our new life in Christ implies, let us consider what it is to be born of God.

Whosoever is born of God, saith the Apostle, doth not commit sin. For his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. And again, We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not, 1 John iii. 10. v. 18.

The same Apostle tells us, *Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world.* He overcometh all worldly desires and worldly fears. He is crucified unto the world, and the world crucified unto him. He is dead to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. And he feareth not them that

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can kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.

We must therefore examine into the state of our minds and see whether we are thus changed in our natures, thus born again; whether we are so spiritual as to have overcome the world; so holy as that we cannot commit sin; since it is the undeniable doctrine of scripture, that the new birth is as necessary to salvation, as the believing in Jesus Christ.

XIX. We have seen two marks of those that are born of God. A third is given us by Christ himself. *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*

Well may a Christian be said to be a new creature, since without such a disposition as this, we cannot be Christians, or children of our father, which is in heaven. It is not enough therefore to love our friends, benefactors and relations: but if we are born of God, we love like God; we have an universal love, a tenderness for all mankind, imitating that love which would that *all men should be saved.*

God is love: and he who dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, so he that dwelleth not in love dwelleth not in God.

It is impossible to be a true Christian, and an enemy at the same time.

Mankind hath no enemy but the devil, and those who are of the same spirit.

XX. There is perhaps no duty more contrary to flesh and blood than this; but it is easy to those that are born of God.

For take but away earthly goods and evils, and you take away all hatred and malice; for they are the only causes of those base tempers.

Let us here awhile contemplate the heighth and depth of Christian holiness, and that God-like spirit which it implies! and this alone might convince us, that to be Christians, we must be born again: we must so change our very natures, as to have no desire in our souls, but that of being like God.

And till we rejoice and delight only in God, we cannot have this love to our fellow creatures. We

We may therefore learn from this, as well as from what was observed before, that Christianity does not consist in doing no harm, or in doing good, (as it is called) nor yet in any particular moral virtues, as some idly suppose; but in an intire change of our hearts, of all our natural tempers, and a life wholly devoted to God.

XXI. The same doctrine is farther taught by our blessed Saviour, when speaking of little children, he saith, *suffer them to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God*, Luke xviii. 16.

If we are not resolved to deceive ourselves, if we have not eyes that see not, and ears that hear not, we must perceive that these words imply some mighty change in our nature.

Now the peculiar condition of infants is such, that they have every thing to learn; they are to be taught by others, what they are to hope and fear, and wherein their proper happiness consists.

And in this sense first, we are to become as little children: to be as though we had every thing to learn, and suffer ourselves to be taught, what we are to chuse, and what we are to avoid: to pretend to no wisdom of our own, but be ready to be taught of God, the only way of pursuing that only happiness, which God in Christ proposes to us; and to accept it with such simplicity of mind as little children who have nothing of their own to oppose it.

XXII. But how is this infant temper thus essential to Christianity? Does the kingdom of God consist only of those that have it? This then is another undeniable proof that Christianity implies a *new creature*, such as having renounced the prejudices of life, the maxims of human wisdom, gives itself with a childlike submission and simplicity, to be entirely governed by the doctrines and spirit of Christ. Craft and policy, selfish cunning, proud abilities and vain endowments, have no admittance in this holy state of society with Christ in God. The wisdom of this world, the intrigues of life, the designs of greatness and ambition, lead to another kingdom. He that follows Christ must be emptied of this vain furniture, and put on the meek ornament of infant and undesigning simplicity.

Where is the wise ? where is the scribe ? where is the disputer of this world ? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?

If we will partake of the wisdom of God, we must judge of this world, and its most boasted gifts, as the wisdom of God judgeth of them ; we must deem them foolishness, and with undivided hearts, labour after one wisdom, one happiness, in being intirely devoted to God.

XXIII. From all these considerations it appears, that Christianity implies a *new creature*, and a life entirely devoted to God.

Now, if this be Christianity, it may serve to instruct two sorts of people :

First, those who are content with an outward religion : those whose Christianity lies only in an outward decency and regularity of life.

I don't mean those that are insincere or hypocritical : but all those who are content with outward religion ; all who are content with any thing short of that inward holiness, the newness of heart and spirit, which the gospel describe.

They should consider that charity, chastity, sobriety and justice, may be practised without Christianity. A Jew, a Heathen, may be (what you call) charitable and temperate : but to make these parts of Christianity, they must proceed from a heart truly turned to God, that is full of infant simplicity, that is crucified with Christ, that is born again of the spirit, that has overcome the world. Temperance or justice without this turn of heart, may be the temperance of a Jew or a Heathen : but it is not Christian temperance or justice 'till it proceeds from a Christian spirit. Could we do and suffer all that Christ himself did and suffered, yet if it was not all done in the same temper, in the Spirit of Christ, it would profit us nothing.

XXIV. A Christian is sober, charitable and just, upon the same principles, and with the same spirit that he receives the holy communion, as acts of obedience to God, and so many instances of a heart truly devoted to God.

A Christian is sober, not only so far as suits with a regular life, but so as becomes one who is born of
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the Holy Spirit, that is, one with Christ, who dwelleth in God and God in him.

He is charitable, not only so far as it suits with his natural temper, and with a good esteem among men ; but in such a measure as is suitable to the spirit and doctrine of the gospel.

For indeed, neither charity, nor temperance, nor justice, nor any other virtues (as they are called) are parts of Christian holiness, till they spring from holiness of heart, from the mind that was in Christ.

This is what cannot be too much considered by those whose religion has made no change in their hearts ; who fancy themselves Christians, only because of the regularity of their lives, although they have never experienced a renewal in the spirit of their minds, after the image of him that created them ; who pray without devotion, give alms without charity, and are Christians without the spirit of Christianity.

XXV. Secondly, this doctrine may serve to instruct those who are convinced, that they have been hitherto strangers to religion.

Some people, who are ashamed of their past lives, and begin to look towards religion, think they have done enough when they have reformed the outward course of their lives, when they have left off their gross vices and follies, or are grown careful of some particular duties or virtues.

Thus, a man who has been a drunkard many years, thinks he has made a sufficient change by becoming temperate : another imagines he is in a very good and safe state, because he does not neglect the public worship, as he used to do : a lady fancies she lives enough to God, because she has left off plays, and lives more at home than formerly.

But such people should consider, that Christianity does not consist in the fewness of our vices ; no nor in any one particular virtue, nor yet in the outward amendment of our lives : but in such a thorough change of heart, as makes the love of God the spring and measure, and rule, of all our tempers and actions.

XXVI. It is a miserable error to think we are Christians, because we are less vain or covetous, more sober or decent in our behaviour than we used

to be. Yet this is the case with many, who think they are well, because they are not so bad as they were; not considering how thorough a change, how entire a reformation of heart as well as life, Christianity implies. But let such people consider, that they are not members of Christ's mystical body, till they are united unto him by a *new spirit*; that they have not entered into the kingdom of God, till they have entered into an *infant simplicity* of heart, 'till they are so born of God as *not to commit sin*; so full of an heavenly spirit as to have overcome the world.

Let them remember, *he that is in Christ is a new creature*, and that nothing short of this will avail before God; nothing less than the entire renewal of the soul in righteousness and all true holiness. Let them remember that there is no religion that will stand us in any stead, but that which is the conversion of the heart to God; when all our tempers are holy, heavenly, divine.

XXVII. Therefore let us look carefully to ourselves, and consider what manner of spirit we are of: Let us not think our condition safe, because we are of this or that church or persuasion, or because we are strict observers of the out-ward offices of religion. For we cannot but see, these are marks that belong to more than belong to Christ. All are not his, that *prophecy* or even *cast out devils*, and *work miracles in his name*. Much less those who with corrupt minds and worldly hearts, are only *baptized in his name*.

If religion has taken possession of our hearts, altered the whole turn of our minds, and changed the stream of our affections; if it has given us *new joys and griefs*, *new hopes and fears*: if *all things in us are become new*; if *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts*, by the Holy Ghost given unto us, and his spirit *bear-eth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God*; then we are Christians, not in name only, but in truth; then we do believe in the Holy Jesus, and we shall rejoice in the day of Christ, that we have not *run in vain*, neither laboured in vain.